

SERVICE QUALITY

Engineering and Management Services Department

The Engineering and Management Services Department's mission (EMS) is to develop, enhance and support utility management to provide quality services to customers and effective cost control of critical resources such as capital, technology and people. The Engineering staff of EMS conducts depreciation studies and provides specialized engineering analysis and assistance in all types of regulated utilities and quality of service support for local telephone exchange carriers through its line testing programs.

Major Projects

The staff participated in a number of mergers during the year and recommended a series of quality of service indicators to ensure that service quality does not deteriorate after the completion of the mergers. Service quality indicators were recommended as well as a reporting mechanism. Specifically, staff participated in the Southern Union merger with Pennsylvania Enterprises, Providence Energy, Fall River Gas, and Valley Resources and the merger of Atmos Energy with Associated Natural Gas Company. Staff also provided testimony in requests before the PSC for UtiliCorp United Inc. to merge with St. Joseph Light and Power Company and Empire District Electric Company. This participation was consistent with staff's past concerns in merger cases regarding the potential for service to decline in a post merger environment.

The PSC retained the services of the National Regulatory Research Institute (NRRI) to develop and administer a gas customer opinion survey to assess the consumer's level of satisfaction with their present service and their expectations. The main objective of the study was to determine the overall quality of service received by Missouri's natural gas customers. The survey also provided the PSC with information useful in developing benchmark outcome goals for consumer education efforts. The telephone survey sampled 1,251 residential customers of Missouri natural gas utilities.

Staff completed its review of the Customer

Services functions of AmerenUE. A total of 28 recommendations were made for improvement in the areas of billing, meter reading, credit and collections and service center operations. Staff will review the Company's progress in evaluating and implementing these improvements. An additional investigation has been initiated at AmerenUE to review specific problems associated with billing systems for gas services.

Staff developed a monthly report that presents customer complaint trends over the most recent 18 months for electric, gas, telephone, water and sewer utilities. The report is a useful tool in helping to identify utilities that may be exhibiting less than satisfactory performance. The report's database can be searched to determine the nature of complaints that are causing utilities to exhibit negative trends. The report is presently being enhanced to incorporate an increased range of utility types.

Engineering staff developed a technical training class on regulatory depreciation. This class was conducted for other PSC regulatory staff to acquaint them with depreciation issues.

Engineering staff also participated in the Raytown Water, Missouri American Water, St. Joseph Light and Power and AmerenUE rate cases, as well as other cases, providing testimony and support in engineering and depreciation analysis. Staff is also presently participating in the St. Louis County Water rate case.

Staff from the Engineering and Management Services Department maintain an awareness of developments across the country by their participation in NARUC staff subcommittees and work projects. They have also been active in trade organizations such as the Society of Depreciation Professionals and Missouri Telephone Industry Association.

Participation in multi-disciplinary project teams formed within the PSC to address specific technical or administrative issues has been an important role for EMS staff. They have assisted in a number of internal projects and teams including strategic planning, the Task Force on Electric Restructuring, consumer quality issues and the automation of internal and external process improvements.